

CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE



RURAL CAUCUS

NEWSLETTER

Thank you for taking the time to read the California State Legislative Rural Caucus Newsletter. This newsletter is designed to keep you informed of Rural Caucus activities, accomplishments, upcoming events, and issues affecting rural California. The Rural Caucus is a bipartisan group of 41 Legislators from both the Assembly and Senate. Revitalized early last year, its mission is to promote and protect rural interests in California and bring them to the forefront of the Legislature.



Rural Health Workshops

The Rural Caucus and the California State Rural Health Association (CSRHA) are working together to address rural healthcare issues facing California. Beginning in January 2004, the Rural Caucus and the CSRHA began hosting a series of educational workshops for government representatives and rural leaders throughout the state to address priority issues for improving the health of rural communities in California. There are four main objectives of these workshops. First, to provide a forum for decision-makers and rural healthcare leaders to develop partnerships and an opportunity to work together. Secondly, to educate legislators, their staff, and government issues on the priority issues that are facing rural communities related to healthcare. Third, present the key issues and offer potential solutions that legislators and others can address to advance rural healthcare in California. Lastly, the workshops hope to highlight rural healthcare as a priority for California among the state's leadership and develop solutions that can make a difference in the 2004 legislative season. Our next workshop will be held on March 17. The topic is **'Critical Access Hospital Programs and the Vital Role of Medi-Cal for Rural Communities'**. For more information on the upcoming workshop please call Gurbax Sahota at (916) 930-9330.



Grant Funding Secured



Recently, the California Endowment has approved grant funding for a rural healthcare policy analyst position to staff the Rural Caucus. The analyst will report directly to the Rural Caucus Chair, Assemblyman Dave Cogdill, the Vice Chair, Senator Denise Ducheny, and the Center for California Studies at CSU Stanislaus. The primary focus for this position will be health issues that impact individuals, families, and communities in rural California. The Rural Caucus and the California Endowment have worked together for the past year to secure the funding for this position. The California Endowment is a private, statewide health foundation that awards grants to organizations that directly benefit the health and well-being of the people of California. Key areas of interest include multicultural health and access to health care. The Caucus plans on having the position filled in February.

Rural Caucus on the Web

In coordination with the Legislative Data Center, the Rural Caucus designed an official website linked to the Senate and Assembly web pages. The site can be accessed at www.assembly.ca.gov/ruralcaucus. It provides legislative staff, rural stakeholder organizations and rural Californians with a tool to access vital government information to help them confront their unique challenges. The site includes a “Press Room” page and an “Events” page that house press releases and informational updates detailing various caucus events. The “Resources” page is designed to provide links to information useful to rural organizations and citizens. Another page is reserved for “Policy Papers and Analyses” to be generated primarily by the Rural Caucus Health Consultant and other contributing writers and researchers.

Rural Caucus Membership

Since being revitalized last year by Assemblyman Dave Cogdill and Senator Chuck Poochigian, the bi-partisan Rural Caucus now has 41 members from both the Assembly and the Senate. The Caucus officers are listed below for your reference. For a full membership list, please visit the Rural Caucus website at www.assembly.ca.gov/ruralcaucus. Please do not hesitate to call on any of them with regard to rural issues.

- **Chair:** Assemblyman Dave Cogdill
- **Vice Chair:** Senator Denise Ducheny
- **Secretary:** Assemblyman Greg Aghazarian



Governor Schwarzenegger

The Rural Caucus is working closely with the Governor's Administration to highlight the importance of meeting the needs of rural Californians through the Rural Policy Task Force. This task force is an intergovernmental coordinating body mandated by state statute and organized by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. Recently, Rural Caucus Chair, Assemblyman Dave Cogdill, sent a letter to the Governor's office in an effort to build a relationship and explain the caucus' role in educating members, putting on various summits, and providing outreach to rural communities. The letter also highlighted the caucus' involvement in the past with the Rural Policy Task Force and their hope to continue that relationship. By working together, the Rural Caucus and the Rural Policy Task Force will work together in a united effort to ensure that rural issues facing California are brought to the forefront of government.

Rural Funding

Over 75 percent of California is rural; however, historically, definitions developed at the federal level have not been designed to reflect the unique characteristics of our state's geography and county configuration, thus putting many of our rural communities at a disadvantage. Recently the Caucus sent a letter to the Office of Rural Health Policy in an effort to have the department adopt California's Medical Service Study Areas (MSSA) as an alternative to the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) methodology for determining eligibility to apply for rural health funds. We believe the MSSA system is a more appropriate definition of rural for California. While we have not received a response to date, we will continue to keep you informed of the progress we have made in this area.

Additional Information

If you would like more information about the California State Legislature Rural Caucus or would like to subscribe to the electronic newsletter, please call Assemblyman Cogdill's office at (916) 319-2025 or email chuck.hahn@asm.ca.gov. Also, please do not hesitate to find us on the web at www.assembly.ca.gov/ruralcaucus.

